



Date: May 16, 2005
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BLM ISSUES SHEPHERD AH NEI OHV PLAN

The Billings Field Office has decided on the future management of the 1,063-acre Shepherd Ah Nei Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) area. The area has been closed to OHV use since April 23, 2004, in order to comply with a civil case judgment.

The earliest the area could be re-opened is the weekend of June 17. The opening date depends on whether appeals of the decision are filed. The BLM has established a 24-hour information hotline so users can obtain current information on riding conditions, closures, or limitations in effect. That number is 896-5014.

The Billings Field Office analyzed five alternatives for the management of the area in an environmental assessment released in January for public review and comment. According to Billings Field Manager Sandy Brooks, "With this decision, we hope to continue OHV use in the Shepherd Ah Nei area at a level that provides a variety of motorized recreational opportunities, protects resource values, and addresses conflicts."

Under the decision, approximately six miles of the 50 miles of roads and trails will be permanently closed. During periods of wet or muddy conditions or when fire restrictions warrant, the entire OHV area will be closed. Specific areas or trails posing a threat to public safety or those undergoing stabilization and rehabilitation work or weed treatment applications will be closed until the condition is resolved.

Beginning January 1, 2006, all vehicles operating in the OHV area will be required to purchase a use permit. These permits will be issued for the calendar year and all monies generated from sales will be used to support trail improvement projects and maintenance and operations at the Shepherd Ah Nei OHV area.

One of the issues identified through public involvement and comment was the noise associated with OHV recreation. In order to address these concerns, riding hours have been established for the OHV area which are similar to quiet hours or open/closed schedules commonly associated with public campgrounds and day use areas.

The decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals within 30 days of the date of the decision which was May 13, 2005. For more information or a copy of the EA and decision, contact the Billings Field Office at (406) 896-5013 or 5001 Southgate Drive, Billings, MT 59101.

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